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Prepared Remarks

“Irish in Korea” Posthumous Naturalization Ceremony
October 30, 2003

Thank you Alfonso.

I am pleased to welcome the family and friends of the twenty-eight brave soldiers we honor today, especially the thirty-three relatives who traveled from Ireland for this historic ceremony.

The Posthumous Citizenship Restoration Act of 2002 makes it possible for the United States Government to appropriately celebrate non-citizens who give the ultimate sacrifice during a time of military conflict.

We are fortunate to be joined by members of Congress who led on this important, nonpartisan initiative.

Senator Schumer; Congressmen Meehan, McGovern, Neal and Israel, I thank you for your participation today, and for your strong support of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Senator Kennedy, it is good to see you again. I want to especially acknowledge your presence and your steadfast commitment to working with my team as we fundamentally transform the delivery of immigration and citizenship services.

Secretary Brownlee, I thank you for joining us and for Army's defense of America. The call that our brave men and women in uniform answer to preserve our freedoms, around the world, makes this ceremony all the more powerful. Assistant Secretary McLemore, I value your attendance and appreciate the Department of Veterans Affairs' responsibility to serve those who once served us.

Ambassador Fahey, it is particularly meaningful that you are present. Irish immigrants helped to define America. We can find no better example than the twenty-eight poignant stories of your countrymen, who today, posthumously, join the American family. They honor Ireland with their valor, as much as they do the United States, with their sacrifice.

Colonel Wang and Lieutenant Colonel Kim of the Korean Embassy, thank you for being here. Please convey the Administration's appreciation to the people of the Land of the Morning Calm.

I find posthumous naturalizations to be a paradox. They are solemn and somber, while inspiring and patriotic. Although I personally sign each certificate, this is just my third posthumous naturalization ceremony. I find that the emotions that accompany these ceremonies are what make them unique.

This past April, just two months into our Bureau's existence, I twice mourned with the families of Marines who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom. We cried, we talked, we prayed. And, then we cried some more.

Though their stories differed, their embrace of the principles and ideals that are the foundation of this great Nation were the same. America is emboldened by their memories.

There is no more fitting way, for a grateful nation, to pay homage to these fine soldiers than to bestow them with posthumous citizenship, the most that we can offer in return.

My wish is that today's ceremony brings closure to families, friends and fellow soldiers. And, I hope that we leave this room with a deeper appreciation for the complexity of the Forgotten War. But, we must not let that appreciation fade. I encourage you to visit the Korean War Memorial and reflect upon the significance of this war, within the context of the Cold War. It was a war of firsts, introducing equipment and strategies from lessons learned during the Second World War.

And, it was the first test of United Nations. Twenty-two countries, from six of the seven continents, fought against the North Korean, Chinese and Soviet troops.

These soldiers were part of that good fight, and their stories resonate. There is a tale of heroism by Patrick Sheahan, Corporal, U.S. Army, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division.

An immigrant from Kerry County, Ireland, Corporal Sheahan was awarded the Bronze Star for carrying four fallen soldiers, while under heavy fire, to a safe perimeter. He maintained their position until his platoon was ready to move.

At that moment, Corporal Sheahan protected his company by charging the enemy embankments. His courage, which led to his death, earned him a Silver Star.

Then there is the story of John Corcoran, Private First Class, U.S. Army, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. In September 1950, after an early morning crossing of the Han River, mortars blasted Private Corcoran's unit, wounding and killing many.

In what was pure reaction, Private Corcoran nobly fell on top of another soldier. To this day, Private Corcoran's tomb in Lafayette Parish, Louisiana is cared for by the soldier whose life he saved.

Or, we can be reminded of loyalty in the story of William Frances Murphy, Private First Class, U.S. Army, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division.

An immigrant from Cork City, Ireland, Private Murphy arrived in New York City in 1948. He came in search of the liberty and opportunity that only America offers.

Private Murphy was in Korea in January 1951, and was captured but one month later by Chinese troops. He and many other Prisoners of War were marched to the Yalu River in North Korea. Along what must have been an unimaginable journey, Private Murphy encountered villagers, and would trade for survival. He would wrap a rock in cloth, pretending as if it were his treasured wristwatch, and offer it, in exchange for food.

Private Murphy died of complications from pneumonia while in captivity in May 1951. Upon his death, a fellow soldier, Billy, hid the watch before the guards could find it.

After the war, Billy was unable to locate Private Murphy's family until, in December of 2002, correspondence connected them, and the watch that kept Murphy alive is now fittingly with his family.

These young, brave men fought and died in a battle for freedom of a people and preservation of a way of life. They no doubt drew motivation from men like Edward O'Brien, the Archbishop for Military Services.

Archbishop O'Brien, though the circumstances may be different, today the U.S. continues to fight for what is right. Thank you for your service to that end.

At this time, I call upon General P. X. Kelley to join me at the podium.

On behalf of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, I thank you for your devotion to the coordination of this ceremony. General Kelley, representing the American Legion, and in the names of twenty-eight brave soldiers and their proud families, do you accept these certificates for posthumous citizenship?

May God bless their memories and may God continue to bless America

General Kelley, before you are seated, I want to present you with an award of appreciation from USCIS.

Allow me to present the certificates for posthumous naturalization to the families of each soldier.

I would be remiss to not mention John Leahy, for his determination of more than twenty-five years to see this day to fruition. Please accept my gratitude and appreciation.

I understand that you would like to present awards of appreciation to people who have helped you get to this day. Before you do, we have an award for you. On behalf U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, I commend your patriotism and sense of civic duty.

Ladies and Gentleman, please join me in a round of applause for Mr. Leahy. Thank you.